

## 6<sup>th</sup> – Vital Villages & Thriving Towns - I



### Iron tools and agriculture

Things made of iron (and steel) are a part of our daily lives. The use of iron began in the subcontinent around 3000 years ago. Some of the largest collections of iron tools and weapons were found in the megalithic burials. Around 2500 years ago, there is evidence for the growing use of iron tools. These included axes for clearing forests, and the iron ploughshare. The ploughshare was useful for increasing agricultural production.

### Other steps to increase production irrigation

The kings and kingdoms you have been reading about could not have existed without the support of flourishing villages. While new tools and the system of transplantation increased production, irrigation was also used. Irrigation works that were built during this time included canals, wells, tanks and artificial lakes

### Who lived in the villages?

There were at least three different kinds of people living in most villages in the southern and northern parts of the subcontinent. In the Tamil region, large landowners were known as Vellalar, ordinary ploughmen were known as Uzhavar, and landless labourers, including slaves, were known as Kadaiyiar and adimai. In the northern part of the country, the village headman was known as the Grama Bhojaka. Usually, men from the same family held the position for generations. In other words, the post was hereditary. The Grama Bhojaka was often the largest landowner. Generally, he had slaves and hired workers to cultivate the land. He was powerful, the king often used him to collect taxes from the village. He also functioned as a judge, and sometimes as a policeman. There were other independent farmers, known as Grihapatis, most of whom were smaller landowners. And then there were men and women such as the Dasa Karmakara, who did not own land, and had to earn a living working on the fields owned by others. In most villages there were also some crafts persons such as the blacksmith, potter, carpenter and weaver.

### Finding out about cities: stories, Travelers, sculpture and archaeology

Many of the cities that developed from about 2500 years ago were capitals of the mahajanapads. Some of these cities were surrounded by massive fortification walls. In main cities, archaeologists have found rows of pots, or ceramic rings arranged one on top of the other. These are known as ring wells. These seem to have been used as toilets in some cases, and as drains and garbage dumps. These ring wells are usually found in individual houses.

### Coins

Wealth is measured in terms of coins. Archaeologists have found several thousands of coins belonging to ancient period. The earliest coins which were in use for about 500 years were punch marked coins. They have been given this name because the designs were punched on to the metal- silver or copper.

### Cities with many functions

Mathura has been an important settlement for more than 2500 years. It was important because it was located at the cross roads of two major routes of travel and trade- from the northwest to the east and from north to south. There were fortifications around three city. Mathura was also a centre where some extremely fine sculpture was produced. Mathura became the second capital of the Kushanas. Mathura was also a religious centre- there were Buddhist monasteries, Jaina



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shrines and it was an important centre for the worship of Krishna. Several inscriptions on surfaces such as stone slabs and statues have been found in Mathura.

### Crafts and crafts persons

We also have archaeological evidence for crafts. These include extremely fine pottery, known as the northern black polished ware. It gets its name from the fact that it is generally found in the northern part of the subcontinent. It is usually black in colour, and has a fine sheen. There were famous centers such as Varanasi in the north, and Madurai in the south. Many crafts persons and merchants now formed associations known as shrines. These shrines' of crafts persons provided training, procured raw material, and distributed the finished product.

### A closer look- Arikamedu

Arikamedu was a coastal settlement where ships unloaded goods from distant lands. A massive brick structure, which may have been a warehouse, was found at the site. Other finds include pottery from the Mediterranean region, such as amphorae (tall double-handled jars that contained liquids such as wine or oil) and stamped red-glazed pottery, known as Arretine ware, which was named after a city in Italy. This was made by pressing wet clay into a stamped mould. Small tanks have been found that were probably dyeing vats, used to dye cloth.

### The Second Urbanisation:-

Urbanisation is the process by which larger rural settlements gradually grow into towns and then cities, and people move from village to these towns.

- Increased agricultural production led to surplus food supply.
- People took up new occupations and specialized in crafts like weaving, jewellery-making and pottery.
- Surplus food could now be exchanged or traded for other goods.
- This led to the establishment of trade centres. Some of these grew into urban centres (towns and cities).
- The growth of kingdoms and empires in northern India also encouraged the growth of cities.

### Different Kinds of Urban Centres

- **Administrative Towns:** Some towns grew as centres of administration. Some cities became the capitals of powerful kingdoms like Hastinapura, Rajagriha (of Magadha), Kauasamion (of Vatsa), and Shravasti.
- **Market Towns:-** Some towns were market centres of trade. These urban centres were connected to several villages and were places where the villagers could come and exchange their produce for other things they needed. Ujjain was one such town.
- **Port Town:-** Some towns grew around ports. Bharukakacha (Bharuch) was a major port city which handled most of the sea trade from the west. Further down the western coast were the ports of Sopara, Kalyan and Musiri. Tamralipti, on the mouth of the Ganga was the main port on the eastern coast.
- **Religious Centres :-** Some urban centres developed around places of Buddhist, Jain and Hindu pilgrimage. Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati were important Buddhist religious centres. Vaishali, Ujjaini, Kasi, Madurai and Mathura were cities of great religious significance for the Hindus.

### Layout of towns

Most of the towns were enclosed within moats or fortified walls. The houses were built of mud bricks and, in some cases, burnt bricks. Palaces and richer dwellings were made of finely carved wood. Facilities not seen in villages can be seen in excavated urban sites- drains, ring wells and soakage pits to dispose off sewage. These were different from the features of the towns of the Indus civilization.

